

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PRETOR 00294 182226Z

ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W

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O 171124Z JAN 78

FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0224

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

INFO USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

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LONDON FOR ASST SEC. MOOSE

CORRECTED COPY - CLASSIFICATION, MRN, AND CAPTIONS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SF, WA

SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: PROSPECTS FOR PROXIMITY TALKS

REF: (A) PRETORIA 254, (B) STATE 011005

1. WHEN I WAS IN CAPE TOWN YESTERDAY, I STOPPED IN TO SEE BRAND FOURIE ABOUT THE VISIT OF THE NUCLEAR TECHNICAL TEAM (SEPARATE CABLE). HE BROUGHT UP SUBJECT OF PROXIMITY TALKS AND I TOOK ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITY TO PROBE SAG INTENTIONS.

2. FOURIE SAID THAT FOLLOWING PRETORIA TALKS WITH CONTACT GROUP IN EARLY DECEMBER, PRIME MINISTER VORSTER MADE COMMITMENT (HE DID NOT SAY TO WHOM, BUT PRESUMABLY TO WHITE LEADERS IN SWA AND/OR POSSIBLY SAG CABINET) THAT HE WOULD WAIT UNTIL THE NO-CONFIDENCE DEBATE AT THE END OF JANUARY TO SEE WHETHER THE FIVE WERE ABLE TO WORK OUT A SETTLEMENT. IF NOT, HE WOULD GO AHEAD DURING THAT DEBATE WITH THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF A DATE FOR ELECTIONS TO A CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY

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FOLLOWING THE OUTLINE OF THE FIVE POWER PROPOSALS. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUESTION ABOUT WHAT THE PM PLANNED TO SAY ON THAT OCCASION, FOURIE REPLIED THAT TO HIS KNOWLEDGE THIS REMAINED TO BE DECIDED. I POINTED OUT THE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES SUCH AN ANNOUNCEMENT COULD HAVE FOR THE NAMIBIA NEGOTIATION AND URGED A PROMPT, FAVORABLE RESPONSE TO OUR REQUEST THAT THE SAG SET A DATE FOR THE NEW YORK TALKS AS EARLY IN FEBRUARY AS POSSIBLE.

NOTING PRESS SPECULATION THAT BOTHA WOULD PROBABLY NOT ATTEND NEW YORK TALKS BUT MIGHT SEND FOURIE (BOTHA HAD HINTED AT THIS TO PRETORIA FIVE -- PARA 3 OF REFTEL A), I ALSO SAID I HOPED THAT BOTHA WOULD BE ABLE TO ATTEND. FOURIE'S RESPONSE WAS TO (A) DISCLAIM ANY KNOWLEDGE OF HIS GOING IN BOTHA'S PLACE; (B) STRESS THAT IT WOULD BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR BOTHA TO LEAVE SOUTH AFRICA DURING FEBRUARY BECAUSE OF PREVIOUS COMMITMENTS; AND (C) OBSERVE THAT THE CABINET WILL NOT MEET UNTIL TUESDAY, JANUARY 24, AND NO DECISION IS LIKELY TO BE TAKEN UNTIL THEN.

3. WITH REGARD TO THE ADVICE REQUESTED IN REFTEL B, THE SITUATION WE FACE IS ESSENTIALLY THIS:

-- VORSTER APPEARS TO HAVE MADE A COMMITMENT TO ANNOUNCE A DATE FOR ELECTIONS DURING THE WEEK STARTING JANUARY 30. WE CANNOT BE SURE THAT THERE IS NOT SOME ELEMENT OF BLUFF IN THE WAY THIS POINT IS BEING USED BY SAG OFFICIALS, BUT I AM INCLINED TO TAKE THIS ONE SERIOUSLY.

-- VORSTER HAS NOT DECIDED HOW TO RESPOND TO THE FIVE'S INVITATION TO SET A DATE FOR THE NEW YORK TALKS AND IS NOT LIKELY TO DO SO UNTIL AFTER CONSULTING THE CABINET ON JANUARY 24.

-- THE LIKELY OPTIONS FOR THE SAG RESPONSE ARE:
(A) TO SET A DATE WITH AN INDICATION THAT BOTHA WILL PARTICIPATE;
(B) SET A DATE BUT SEND FOURIE;

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(C) SET NO DATE BUT ASK THE FIVE TO SUBMIT THEIR PROPOSALS.

4. IF THE FIVE POWERS ARE TO INFLUENCE VORSTER AND THE CABINET ON THE ELECTION DATE ANNOUNCEMENT AND PARTICIPATION IN THE NEW YORK TALKS, I THINK IT WILL TAKE A DRAMATIC STEP SUCH AS LETTERS FROM THE HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE FIVE OR AT LEAST FROM THE FOREIGN MINISTERS TO BOTHA. THESE LETTERS SHOULD (A) STRESS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEW YORK PROXIMITY TALKS AND THE NEED TO AVOID ACTIONS THAT IN ANY WAY WOULD ADVERSELY EFFECT THE CHANCES FOR A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME; (B) URGE HIM TO PROPOSE AN EARLY DATE IN FEBRUARY WITH BOTHA ATTENDANCE; (C) RECOGNIZE THAT VORSTER MAY FIND IT NECESSARY TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT ELECTION DURING THE NO-CONFIDENCE DEBATE BUT URGE THAT WHATEVER IS SAID IS COUCHED IN A WAY NOT TO PREJUDICE THE NEGOTIATION; (D) INDICATE THAT THE FIVE POWER PROPOSALS WILL BE GIVEN TO THE SAG SOON AND CERTAINLY IN TIME FOR CAREFUL CONSIDERATION PRIOR TO THE NEW YORK TALKS; (E) ACKNOWLEDGE THE SAG DESIRE TO SEE THE INDEPENDENCE PROCESS COMPLETED BY THE END OF THE YEAR AND PLEDGE TO WORK TOWARD THAT END. AN ADDED FEATURE WHICH I BELIEVE WOULD HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON VORSTER IS AN INDICATION THAT AT THE OUTSET OF THE NEW YORK TALKS THE FIVE FOREIGN

MINISTERS WOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET (SAY FOR A DAY) TO REVIEW THE FIVE-POWER PROPOSALS WITH THE PRINCIPAL PARTIES. I DO NOT KNOW HOW PRACTICAL THIS SUGGESTIONS IS, BUT I THINK IT WOULD MAKE IT HARDER FOR VORSTER AND BOTHA TO TURN ASIDE. DEPT WILL RECALL THAT AT LAST FRIDAY'S MEETING WITH BOTHA HE SEEMED TO COMPLAIN THAT HE WAS BEING ASKED TO COME TO NEW YORK TO NEGOTIATE WITH PERSONS OF LESSER RANK AND TO BE PUT ON A PAR WITH NUJOMA. THE OFFER TO RAISE THE TALKS TO A HIGHER LEVEL COULD BE DECISIVE IN CONVINCING THE SAG TO PARTICIPATE AND REFRAIN FROM ANNOUNCING A DATE. IT MIGHT ALSO SERVE TO PERSUADE NUJOMA TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE. TO AFRICAN LEADERS IT WOULD HIGHLIGHT THE EFFORT OF THE FIVE TO FIND A WORKABLE SOLUTION IN NAMIBIA.

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5. IF THE DECISION IS NOT TO USE A HIGH LEVEL APPEAL OF THE NATURE DESCRIBED ABOVE, I THINK THERE IS A BETTER THAN EVEN PROBABILITY THAT VORSTER WILL SAY SOMETHING IN THE NO-CONFIDENCE DEBATE DAMAGING TO THE PROSPECTS FOR HOLDING THE PROXIMITY TALKS. IN THE FACE OF THAT POSSIBILITY, THE SCENARIO DESCRIBED IN PARA 2 OF REFTEL B IS AS GOOD AS CAN BE DEVISED. HOWEVER, RATHER THAN SIMPLY ASK FOR A CLARIFICATION OF INTENTIONS ON THE ELECTION ANNOUNCEMENT, I WOULD RECOMMEND THAT WE URGE VORSTER TO USE GENERAL LANGUAGE THAT WOULD NOT PREJUDGE THIS IMPORTANT ASPECT UNTIL IT CAN BE DISCUSSED AT NEW YORK. IF HE WERE WILLING TO AVOID MENTIONING SPECIFIC DATES AND AGREE TO SEND BOTHA TO NEW YORK WE MAY STILL HAVE A FIGHTING CHANCE TO HOLD THE PROXIMITY TALKS. THE PROSPECTS WOULD BE GREATLY ENHANCED, HOWEVER, IF IT WERE POSSIBLE TO OFFER MINISTERIAL LEVEL TALKS AT LEAST IN THE INITIAL STAGES, LETTING THE CG WORK OUT DETAILS OF A SETTLEMENT PLAN.

6. REGRET DELAY IN RESPONDING TO DEPT'S MESSAGE. SINCE IT WAS NOT GIVEN NIACT IMMEDIATE PRECEDENCE IT DID NOT ARRIVE HERE UNTIL MONDAY MORNING WHEN I WAS IN CAPE TOWN. BOWDLER

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL SETTLEMENT, VISITS, NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS, NEGOTIATIONS, MEETINGS, CAT-B
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PRETOR00294
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: LONDON FOR ASST SEC MOOSE
Executive Order: GS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: P840150-2290, D780029-0215, D780024-0882
Format: TEL
From: PRETORIA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780155/aaaabudj.tel
Line Count: 157
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c3cbcfe2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NODS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: 78 PRETORIA 254, 78 STATE 11005
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 14 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3762517
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CHANGED> MCM 20040427
Subject: NAMIBIA: PROSPECTS FOR PROXIMITY TALKS
TAGS: PARM, PDEV, PINT, SF, WA, US
To: STATE LONDON MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c3cbcfe2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014